



## Veterans/Guard/Reserve Access to Mental Health Services

Texas Council of Community  
Mental Health & Mental Retardation Centers, Inc.

### **The Need: Develop increased community capacity for mental health services for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan conflict, including Guard/Reserves and their families**

- Reserve forces have made up as much as 40% of U.S. forces in Iraq & Afghanistan
- An assessment conducted by the Department of Defense showed that 42.4% of National Guard and reserve-component soldiers returning from Iraq required mental health treatment
- “Citizen-soldiers” often live in communities remote from VA medical facilities – travel is a very formidable barrier to veteran’s seeking needed and continuing treatment
- Department of Defense’s Special Committee on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in a report stated. “VA needs to create a progressive system of engagement and care that meets veterans and their families where they live...”
- PTSD and other mental health difficulties may not present themselves for years

### **Solution: S.38/HR2689 Authorize the VA to Contract with Community Mental Health Providers**

- **VA Contracting with qualified community mental health organizations in rural areas**
  - ◆ Assists the VA in maintaining a full range of mental health services that reach beyond its current capacity
  - ◆ Addresses this growing population’s need for mental health services
  - ◆ Overcomes transportation and distance as a barrier to needed services
  - ◆ Model proven effective in Montana, Washington and South Dakota
  - ◆ VA would partner with Community Mental Health Centers and similar entities to provide:
    - peer outreach and support services,
    - readjustment counseling and
    - needed mental health services.
  - ◆ VA would partner with Community Mental Health Centers and similar entities to provide immediate family members of deployed veterans, during three-year period following return from deployment, education, support, counseling, and mental health services to assist in:
    - Readjustment to civilian life
    - Recovery from an illness incurred during such deployment
    - Readjustment of the family following the veteran’s return
- **VA oversight of community services to Veterans**
  - ◆ Establishes program to train veterans to provide peer outreach and support services
  - ◆ Establishes training program for clinicians of community health centers and entities contracted to provide services to Veterans
- **Extend eligibility for VA health care from the current two years to five years**
  - ◆ Injuries incurred by today’s war veterans may not present themselves immediately
  - ◆ Allows adequate time for detection, diagnosis and treatment
  - ◆ Allows for “stigma” factor which may delay diagnosis and treatment